

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----110672 251844Z /43

R 251757Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6567
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 28489

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, LE, FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH CONDITIONS FOR RENEWAL OF UNIFIL

REF: A) 211412 B) PARIS 24552

1. SUMMARY: I RAISED WITH MFA SECRETARY GENERAL SOUTOU AUGUST 25 US CONCERN ABOUT FRENCH CONDITIONS ON THE RENEWAL OF UNIFIL AND MADE THE POINTS IN REFTEL A. SOUTOU INDICATED THAT THE FRENCH WERE NOT LIKELY TO PULL OUT OF UNIFIL, BUT ADDED THAT CONTINUED GOF PARTICIPATION SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED BY EITHER LEBANON OR ISRAEL. HE SAID A FINAL FRENCH DECISION HAD NOT BEEN TAKEN AND PROBABLY WOULD NOT BE TAKEN UNTIL THE DISCUSSIONS IN NEW YORK SHORTLY BEFORE THE CURRENT MANDATE EXPIRES. HE CONCEDED THAT THE FRENCH EXPECTED TO USE THEIR AMBIGUITY IN ORDER TO PUT PRESSURE ON LEBANON AND ISRAEL. HE
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REPEATED (REFTEL B) THAT UNIFIL'S SECOND MANDATE SHOULD BE SHORTER AND THAT HE ENVISAGES A REDUCTION IN THE FRENCH CONTINGENT EITHER DURING OR AFTER THE SECOND MANDATE. END SUMMARY

2. SOUTOU BEGAN HIS RESPONSE TO MY DEMARCHE BY NOTING THAT FOREIGN MINISTER GUIRINGAUD HAD RAISED

THE UNIFIL ISSUE AT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS' MEETING
PRESIDED OVER BY PRESIDENT GISCARD AUGUST 24. SOUTOU
SAID A DEFINITIVE DECISION ON FRENCH PARTICIPATION
HAD NOT BEEN MADE, BUT HE LEFT THE STRONG IMPLICATION
THAT THE FRENCH WILL CONTINUE. HE SAID THAT EARLIER
THE GOF HAD ENVISAGED OPPOSING RENEWAL OF THE MANDATE.
HE REFERRED TO FRANCE'S RESPONSIBILITY AS A PERMANENT
SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBER AND TO THE FACT THAT, IN ITS
LOGISTICS ROLE, THE FRENCH CONTINGENT IS THE HEART
OF UNIFIL. HE CAUTIONED, HOWEVER, THAT HE WAS NOT
SPEAKING IN THE GOVERNMENT'S NAME AND COULD NOT BE
SURE WHAT THE DEFINITIVE ANSWER WOULD BE.

3. SOUTOU THEN ELABORATED ON THE MFA'S EXTREME DIS-
TRUST OF BOTH THE LEBANESE AND ISRAELI STRATEGIES
REGARDING SOUTHERN LEBANON. HE EXPRESSED THE CON-
VICTION THAT ISRAEL DOES NOT WANT THE LEBANESE
TROOPS TO REACH THE SOUTH AND HE SAID THAT HADDAD
WOULD NOT BE ACTING AS HE HAD WITHOUT ISRAELI APPROVAL.
UNIFIL, HE CONTINUED, PROVIDES FOR ISRAEL A SECOND
BUFFER, TOGETHER WITH THE CHRISTIAN FORCES, WHOM
SOUTOU CONTINUES TO BELIEVE ARE

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----110998 251907Z /43

R 251757Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6568
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 28489

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VIRTUALLY CONTROLLED BY ISRAEL. ACCORDING TO SOUTOU, THE ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT, IF UNIFIL WERE REPLACED BY LEBANESE FORCES, THE DANGER OF CONFLICT BETWEEN THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS AND THE LEBANESE ARMY WOULD GROW. SOUTOU CLAIMED THAT ISRAEL WAS MAKING AN "HISTORIC ERROR" IN ITS ALLIANCE WITH THE CHRISTIANS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON; IT WAS DIGGING A DITCH BETWEEN "ITS CHRISTIANS" AND THE REST OF LEBANON.

4. AS FOR THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, SOUTOU ASSERTED THE VIEW THAT IT DOES NOT REALLY WANT ITS CONTINGENT TO REACH THE SOUTH AND IN FACT CHOSE ITS LINE OF MARCH FOR PRECISELY THAT REASON. IN HIS VIEW, THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON IS SQUANDERING AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE INCREASED AUTHORITY IN THE COUNTRY AND TO GET ITS TROOPS SOUTH IN A WAY WHICH COULD PROVIDE MAXIMUM PROTECTION FOR THEM THROUGH USING UNIFIL FORCES AS A BUFFER. SOUTOU SAID
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SARKIS COULD GET A SILENT DOMESTIC MAJORITY IN FAVOR OF ENDING THE PROBLEMS IN THE SOUTH. HE ADDED THAT THE MFA'S TASK WOULD BE SIMPLIFIED IF IT COULD TELL GISCARD AND THE FRENCH MILITARY THAT THAT PROCESS HAD BEGUN. SOUTOU COMPLAINED THAT THE LEBANESE ALWAYS COUNT ON OTHERS TO DO THEIR WORK FOR THEM; NOW THEY ARE COUNTING ON THE FRENCH CONTINGENT.

5. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION SOUTOU ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE FRENCH AMBIGUITY IN REACHING (OR AT LEAST REVEALING) THEIR DECISIONS RE UNIFIL WAS MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO PUT MAXIMUM PRESSURE ON BOTH LEBANON AND ISRAEL FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONVINCING BOTH GOVERNMENTS THAT THEY COULD NOT COUNT ON THE FRENCH CONTINGENT. IN SUM, I HAVE THE FEELING THAT SOUTOU WAS REASSURING US THAT THE FRENCH UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR ROLE IN UNIFIL AND WERE NOT DISPOSED TO PULL OUT. BUT AT THE SAME TIME HE WAS SIGNALLING THAT THEIR FINAL DECISION ON THE LENGTH OF THE SECOND MANDATE -- PERHAPS EVEN ON THEIR CONTINUED PARTICIPATION -- WOULD DEPEND TO SOME DEGREE ON GREATER ISRAELI AND LEBANESE MODERATION AND THAT HE WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT THE LEBANESE AND ISRAELI GOVERNMENTS GET THE MESSAGE. HARTMAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEMBERSHIP, NEGOTIATIONS, INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PARIS28489
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780348-1190
Format: TEL
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780823/aaaaatbg.tel
Line Count: 164
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8c56755b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 PARIS 24552
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1620435
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRENCH CONDIT1ONS FOR RENEWAL OF UNIFIL
TAGS: PINT, LE, FR, UNIFIL
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8c56755b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014